



# TRAIL COUNT 2011



In partnership with:  
Guadalupe Park Conservancy  
Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition  
Five Wounds Neighborhood / Communiversity

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## Executive Summary

Trail Count is an annual count and survey of San Jose's off-street bicycle and pedestrian trail users. This event gathers valuable data that supports improved planning, design and grant-writing efforts. Trail Count 2011 was conducted on two days in September. A count at Guadalupe River Trail (Coleman Avenue) occurred on Wednesday, September 14. All other counts and survey distribution occurred on September 28, 2011.

Some key findings about this year's Trail Count event are noted below. Detailed results about Trail Count 2011 are explored in greater detail as part of this report.

**Increase in trail usage (+5.7%)**  
at the Coleman Avenue count  
station along Guadalupe River  
Trail

**Usage** A majority of trail users  
report that trails feel safe, secure  
and well maintained.

**Trails as transportation:**  
51.2% of Guadalupe River Trail  
users report that they were  
commuting or running errands.



**Trails for Tourism:** Most  
responders say that longer  
trails and gap closures could  
attract more visitors to the  
trails.



## Background

### Purpose

Trail Count was initiated in 2007, primarily to address the lack of specific data regarding the number of trail users affected by trail closures due to Downtown San Jose's frequent special events. A formal Trail Closure Policy was instituted due to the documented number of impacted trail users. Since then, Trail Count's objectives have expanded to quantify the number of daily trail users, how the individual trail systems are being used (e.g., for recreation or transportation), user perceptions, and year-to-year changes in trail usage.

The survey component of Trail Count is used to gather feedback and suggestions from trail users on current operations, their needs and suggestions for improvements.

Data gathered from Trail Count makes the City more competitive for limited grant funding. \$615,000 in grant funding was secured from grants during Fiscal Year 2011-12. *Grant applications commonly ask for usage and other data which is only available by conducting Trail Count.*

Seeking trail usage data is consistent with the Trail Program's vision of becoming the national leader in trail development for recreation and commuting. Data collection provides staff with the information necessary to make better planning, design and operational decisions. Trail Count data also helps staff to advocate for maintenance funds and other budget recommendations made to the City Council.

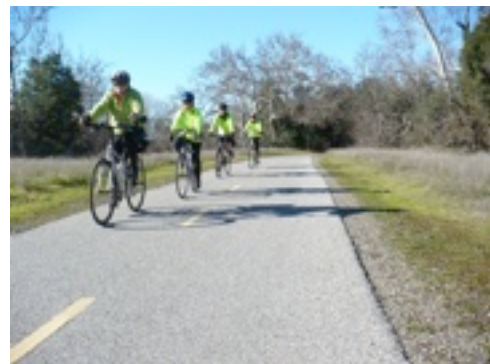
The primary data collection objectives were:

1. Ascertain daily usage volume.
2. Determine trail user needs, demographics and perceptions.
3. Confirm that trails support both recreational and commute uses.
4. Determine the share of daily "commuters".

### Partnership

Trail Count relies heavily on volunteers to count trail users and distribute survey cards - Trail Count participants included:

- **Guadalupe River Park Conservancy** managed and staffed the Coleman Avenue Count Station.
- **Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition** supported outreach to its many members.
- **Five Wounds Neighborhood / Communiversity** managed and staffed the Five Wounds station at East Santa Clara Street.
- **City of San Jose - Department of Parks,**



**Recreation and Neighborhood Services** managed the overall event and volunteer recruitment for remaining count stations.

## Analysis

### Planning Process

This year's count was held on September 14 and 28. The month of September was selected because:

1. School is in session.
2. Weather is mild with rain unlikely.
3. Daylight hours extend past 6:00 pm.
4. A number of grant applications are due late in the year making data timely.
5. The month is recommended by the [National Pedestrian and Bicycle Documentation project](#).

Seven count stations were established in this year's Trail Count:

1. Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Ave (12-hour count)
2. Guadalupe River Trail at Park Ave (12-hour count)
3. Los Gatos Creek at Auzeras Ave (Peak Hour count)
4. Los Gatos Creek at Hamilton Ave (12-hour count)
5. Five Wounds Corridor at Santa Clara Street (Peak Hour count)
6. Los Alamitos Creek Trail near Camden Avenue (12-hour count)
7. Highway 87 Bikeway at Tamien Station (Peak Hour count)

The Five Wounds station was added this year to support the community and City's desire to advocate for land acquisition and trail development. The location is adjacent to an inactive railway corridor. The counting process assumed that persons walking in the north-south direction (direction of the future trail) would be a likely audience for the trail once developed.



Volunteer recruitment occurred for Highway 87 Bikeway at Tamien Station but late cancellations prevented a count at this station.

A *12-hour count* at all stations is highly desirable. However, volunteer resources are limited. Peak Hour counts (7:00-9:00 AM and 4:00-6:00 PM) were used at stations during the typical morning and evening commute periods. A peak-hour count is consistent with the recommendations of the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project.

The National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project's standard recommended counting interval for a PM Peak week day count is 5:00-7:00 PM. However, their recommendations states that "if you have been doing counts using

previously established time periods, please keep using these same time periods for all future counts in order to be consistent.” The City of San Jose has previously used 4:00 to 6:00 PM as its peak hour which is consistent with automotive commutes.)

## **Count Station Descriptions**

1. **Guadalupe River Trail at Coleman Avenue:** The station is located north of downtown San José where many people enjoy the 250-acre Guadalupe River Park & Gardens. The park’s continuous trail borders large employers and housing developments. The Guadalupe River Trail system extends 9 miles from downtown to Silicon Valley’s Golden Triangle (major employers include Cisco, Cadence, eBay).
2. **Guadalupe River Trail at Park Avenue:** This station is centrally located in Downtown San José. It is immediately adjacent to a major employment (Adobe Systems, and other large downtown employers). Counts at this location are complicated by trail users needing to cross a roadway bridge to transition from the east to west banks of the river. This year’s count identified a problem in the count methodology used in prior years (refer to page 22 of this report for discussion).
3. **Los Gatos Creek at Auzerais Avenue:** This reach of the regional trail system is disconnected and short (0.5-mile). The trail links Willow Glen (via Lonus Street, near Lincoln Avenue) to mid-town, a neighborhood to the west of Downtown. Auzerais Avenue provides a low-volume arterial roadway with a signed bikeway leading directly to the Guadalupe River Park and trail near the Children’s Discovery Museum.
4. **Los Gatos Creek at Hamilton Avenue:** The regional trail system in this area is continuous with 9 miles of existing trails linking San José, Campbell and Los Gatos. Los Gatos Creek is recognized as one of Silicon Valley’s most popular trails. The trail is adjacent to employment, housing, retail and park/open space.
5. **Highway 87 Bikeway at Tamien Station:** The trail system is parallel to Highway 87, with on-street bikeways addressing gaps between Downtown and South San José. The Highway 87 Bikeway is primarily for commuting because it does not lead to park sites or other recreational destinations. The Tamien Station that serves Light Rail, Caltrain and local bus services.

## **New count stations in 2011 Trail Count:**

1. **Five Wounds Corridor at Santa Clara Street:** This former railway corridor was acquired by the regional transit agency for the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) project. Land between Highway 101 / Lower Silver Creek to Story Road is likely to be developed as a landscaped urban trail at a future date. The community is well organized and advocating strongly for this development. Although currently undeveloped, the linear parcels are used by the community to walk through the neighborhood. Data collection at this early stage helps to show an existing need and support future use projections.

2. **Los Alamitos Creek Trail near Camden Avenue:** The 6-mile trail system links to Lake Almaden, Calero Creek and Guadalupe River Trail. The trail system travels through open space bounded by low density residential development.

### Data Collection Method

Volunteers were provided with the following tools.

- **Count Sheet:** Trail Count volunteers kept a handwritten tally of trail users. The counting sheet was customized for 12-Hour and Peak-Hour counts. The sheet provided space to count pedestrians, bicyclists and skaters, and their direction of travel. A “notes” field permits the recording of other user types (equestrian, Segway, etc.) or unusual conditions.
- **Survey “Postcard”:** A postcard was offered to all trail users asking that they complete an on-line survey. The card included some basic information about the survey, and asked trail users to complete the survey by October 3. Visitors to the Trail Program web site found a 25-question survey for Trail Count 2011, hosted on SurveyMonkey.com.
- **Instructions:** A printed summary of how to conduct the counts and return the data to City staff for processing. Volunteers were asked to arrive at their count stations 15 minutes in advance and to fax/email the completed sheet at the end of their shift.

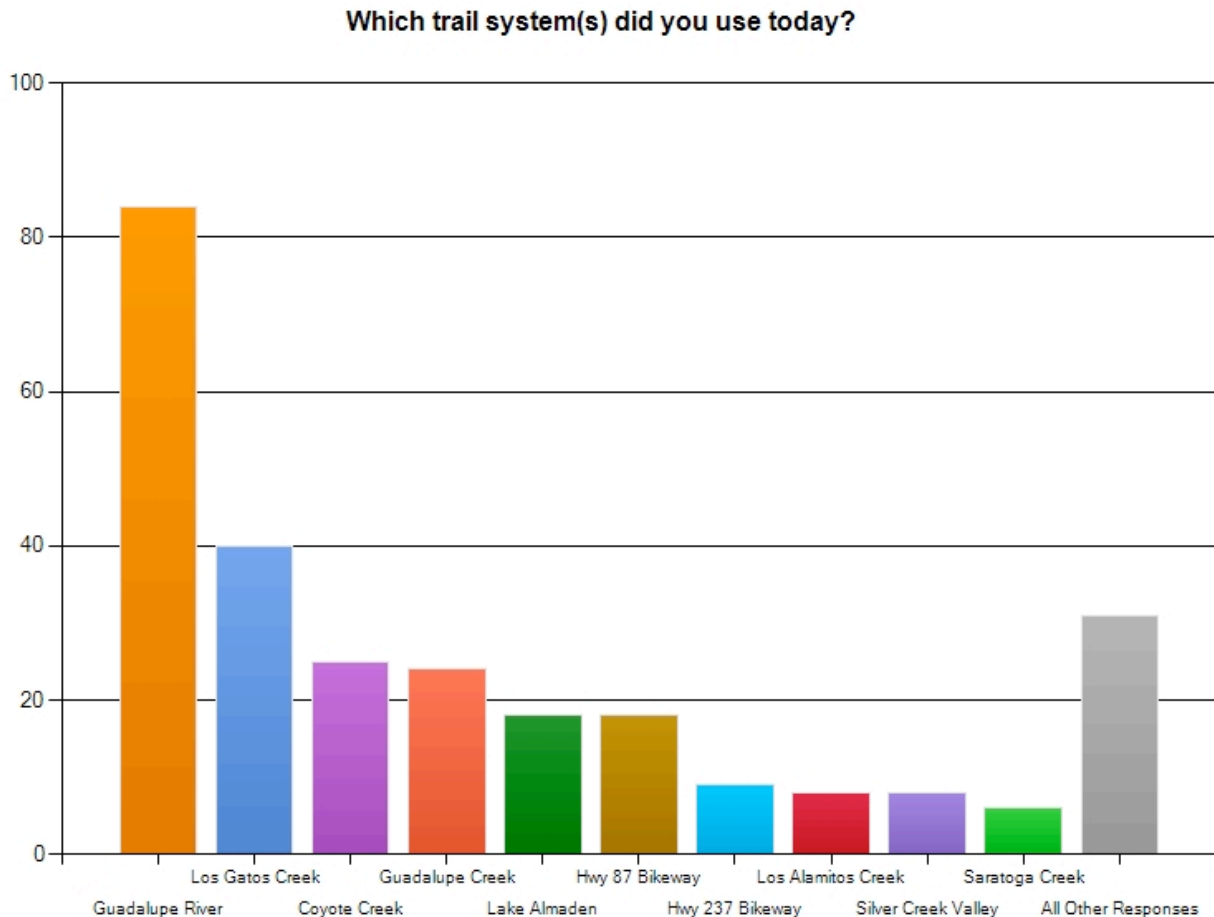


## Survey Findings

**Which trail system did you use today?** A large share of survey responders indicated use of the Guadalupe River Trail. This is not likely an accurate reflection of network-wide daily use because of the limited count stations.

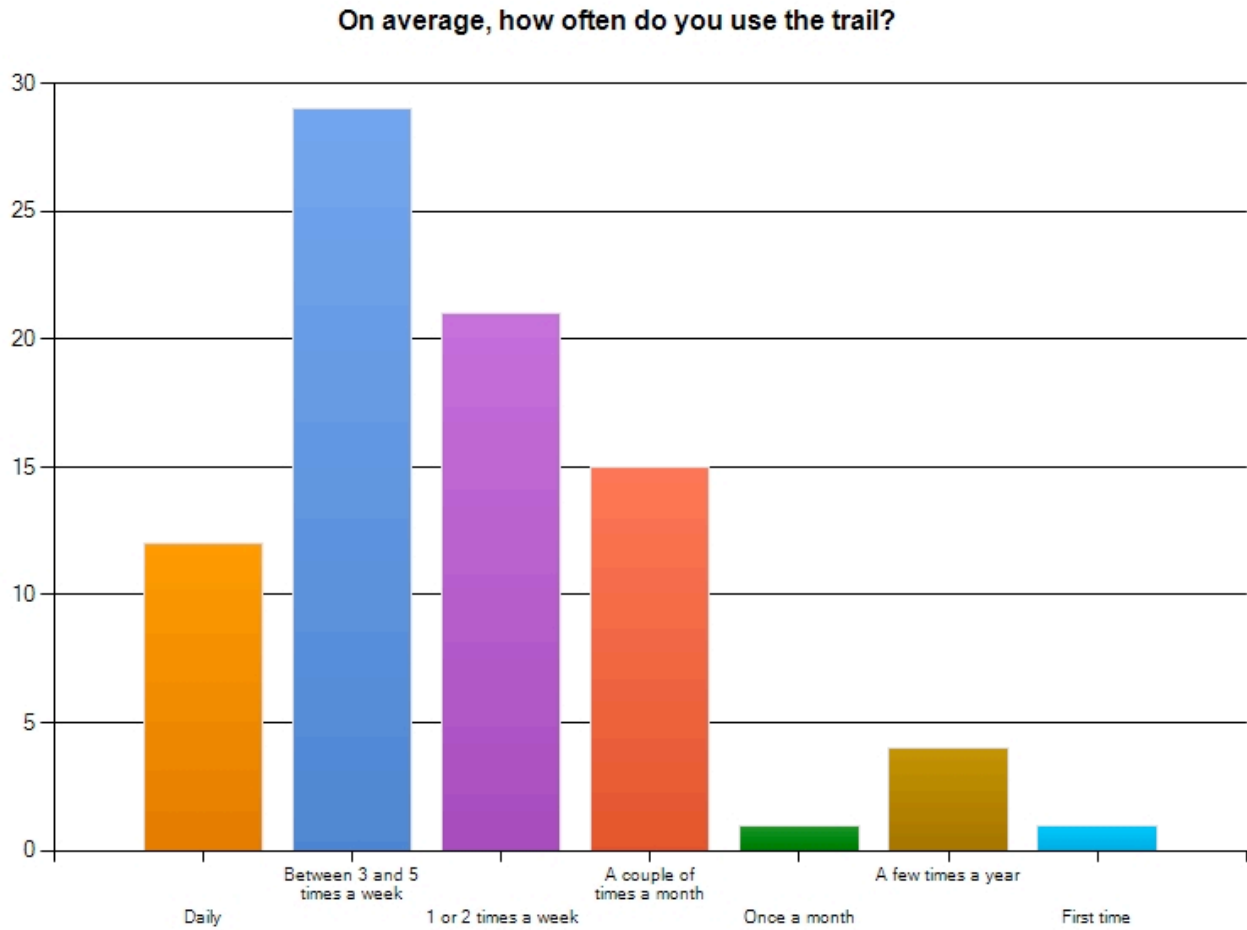
Several trail systems appear on the response that did not have a count station, so this finding does show that people are traveling between trail systems.

A large number of responders said that they use the Guadalupe Creek Trail - this trail system does exist, but is often confused with the Guadalupe River Trail.

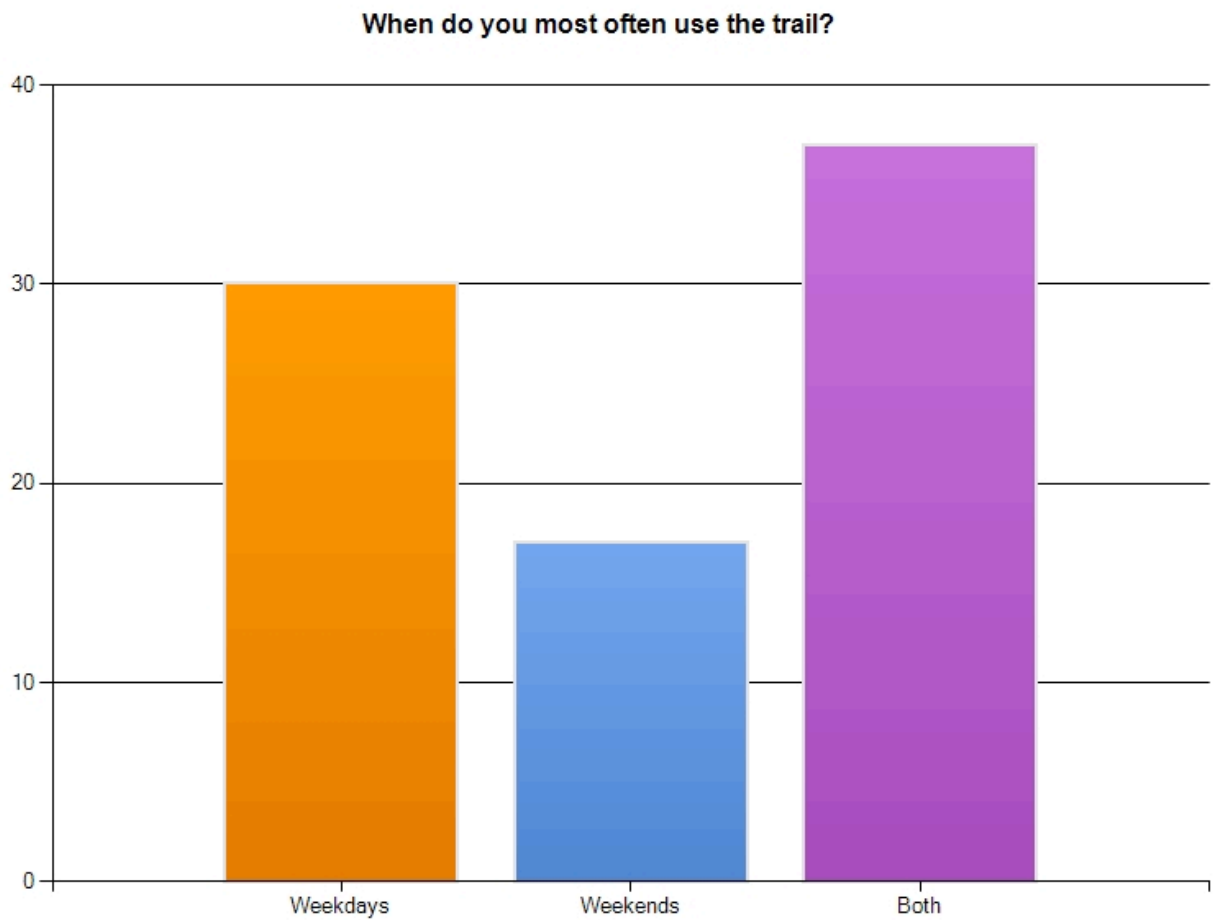




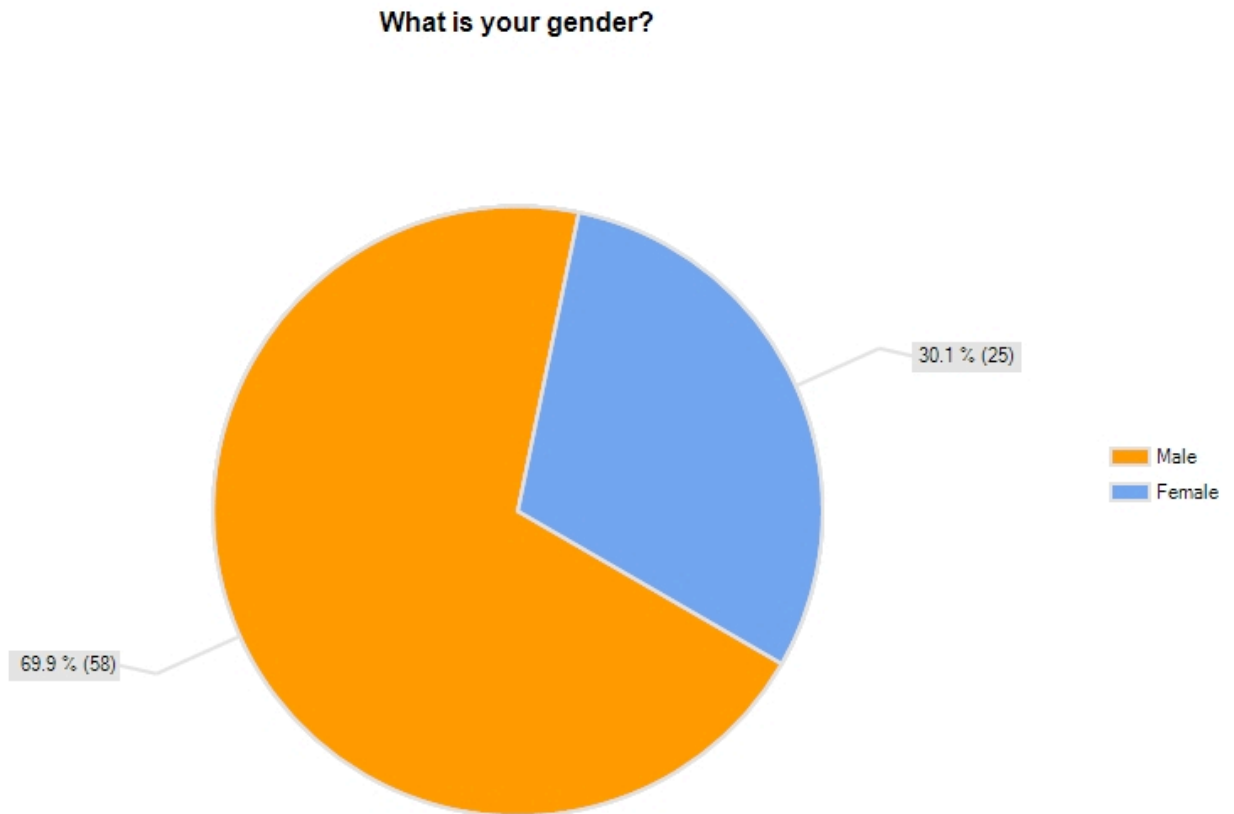
**How often do you use the trails?** A majority of survey responders indicated frequent use with 3 to 5 visits per seek. There are very few infrequent trail users.



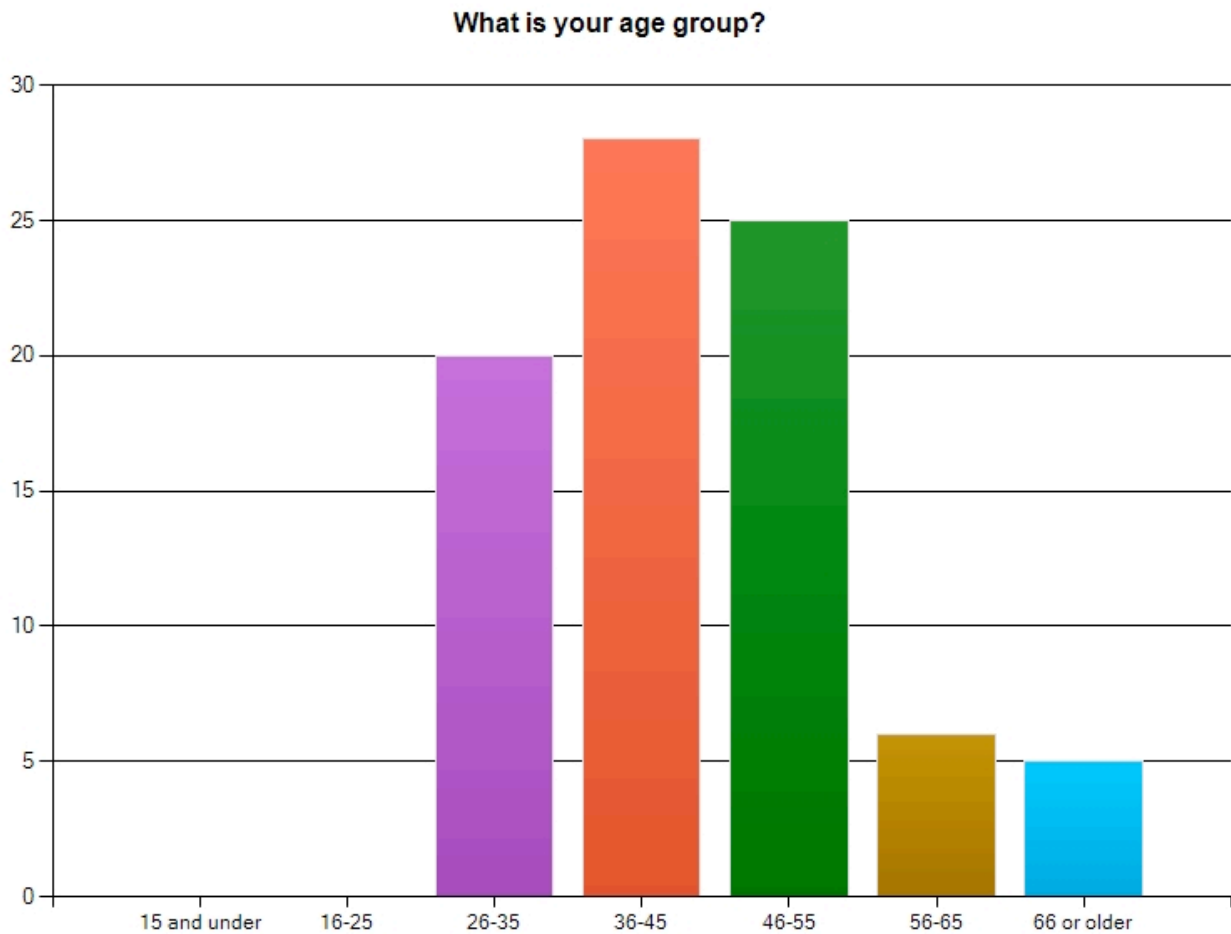
**When do you use the trails?** A majority of responders indicated that they use the trails both on weekdays and weekends. The count occurred on a weekday so the number of “weekend” users may be underrepresented.



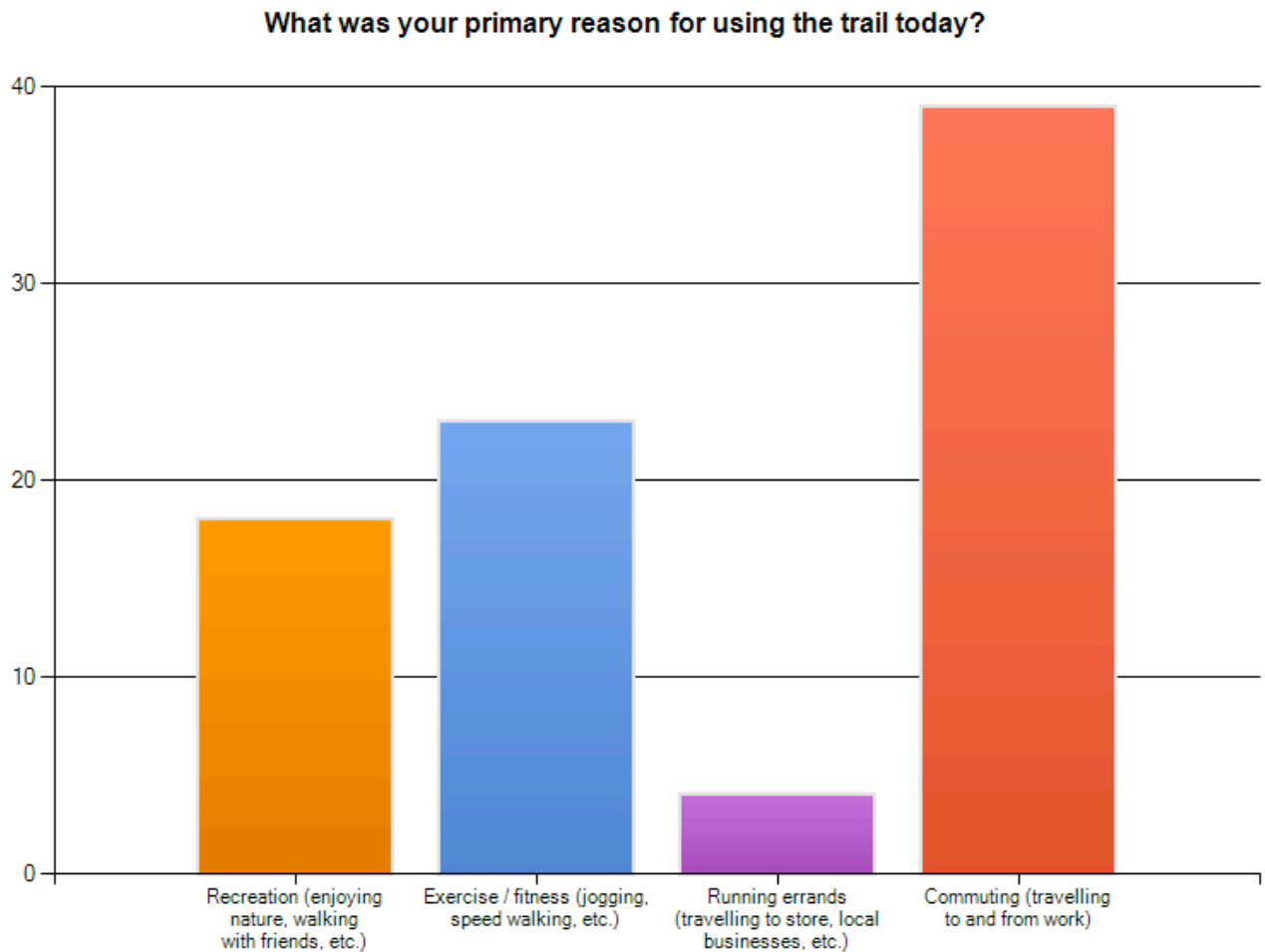
**What is your gender?** As in past years, we found that a large majority of trail users are male. The split in 2010 was about 75/25. Past surveys have identified concerns about safety as a potential limiting factor for females.



**What is your age?** The majority of trail users are between 26 and 55 years of age. No children responded to the survey. If the count had occurred on a weekend, we would have likely seen children as part of family outings.

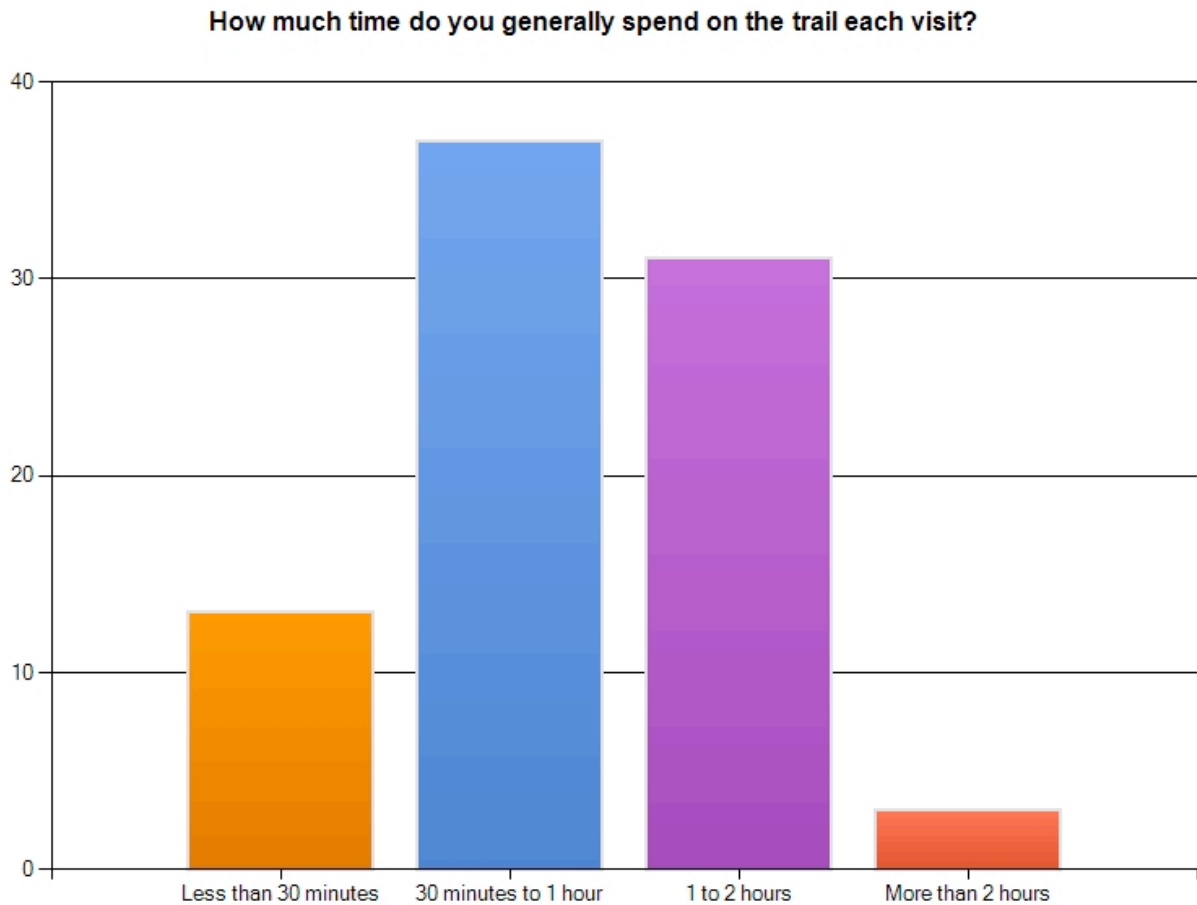


**Why do you use the trails?** We found the results about evenly split between persons exercising/recreating and commuting. It appears that there are equal number of recreational and transportation users, which is consistent with surveys conducted in prior years.

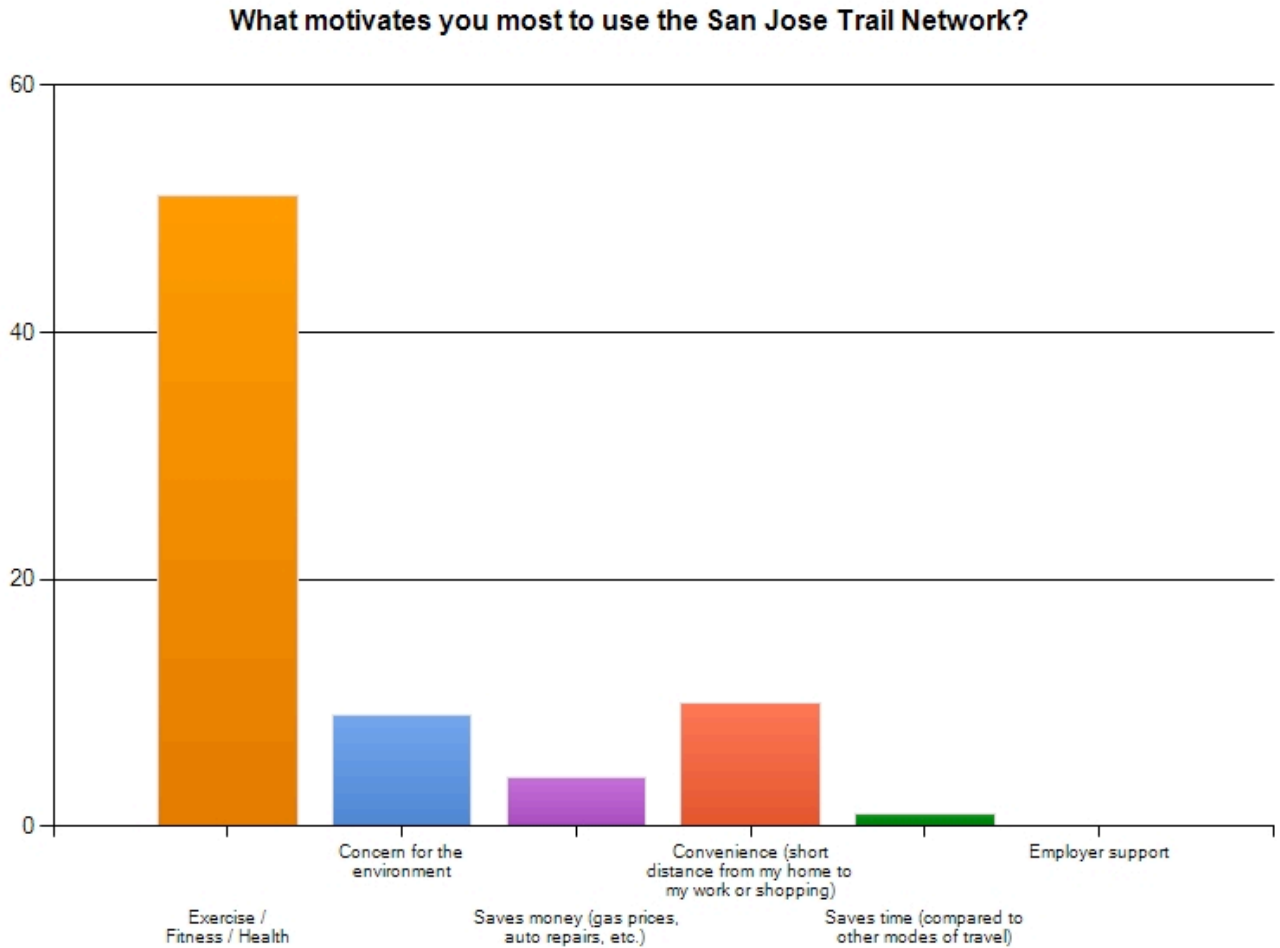




**How much time do you generally spend on the trail?** Most users responded trail visits of between 30 minutes and 2 hours. This number may likely be higher on weekends when persons have more free time for recreation.

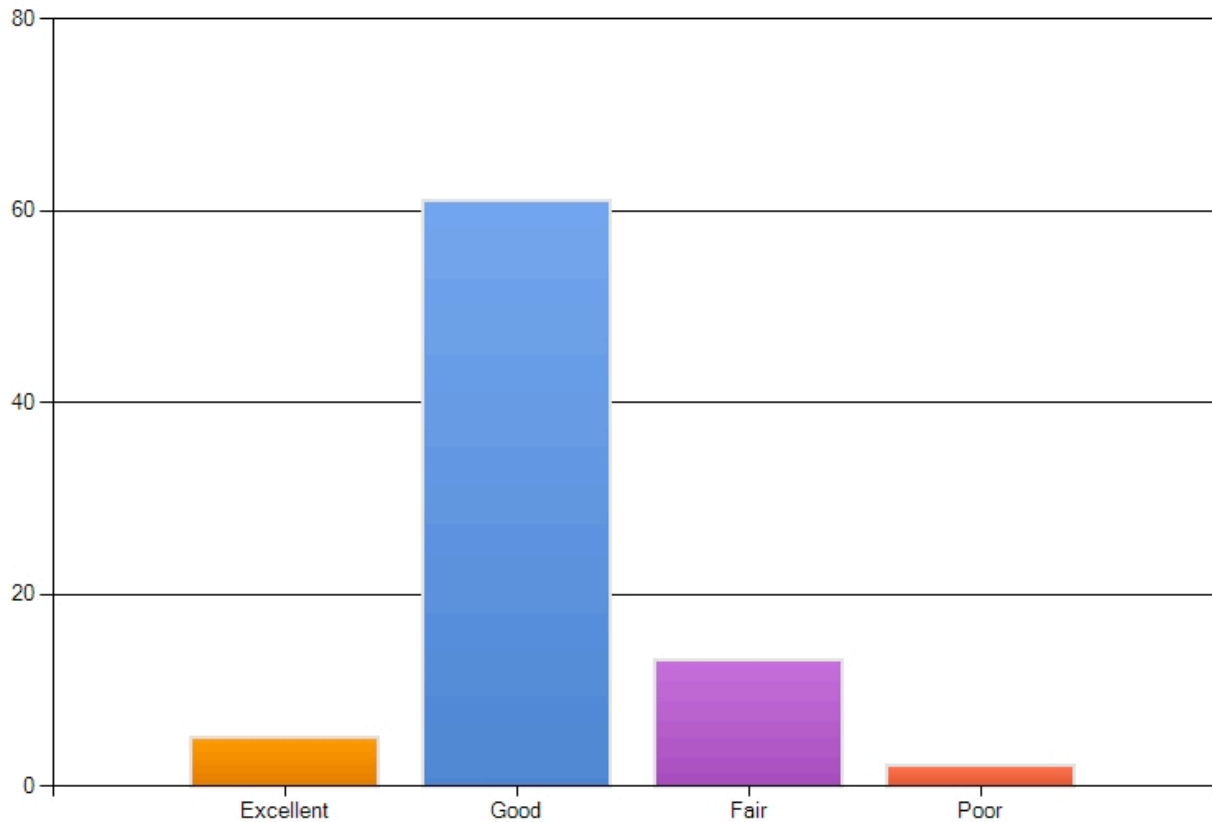


**What motivates you to use the trails?** The large majority of trail users are visiting trails for exercise, fitness and health objectives. Concern for the environment and convenience were other less often reported motivators.

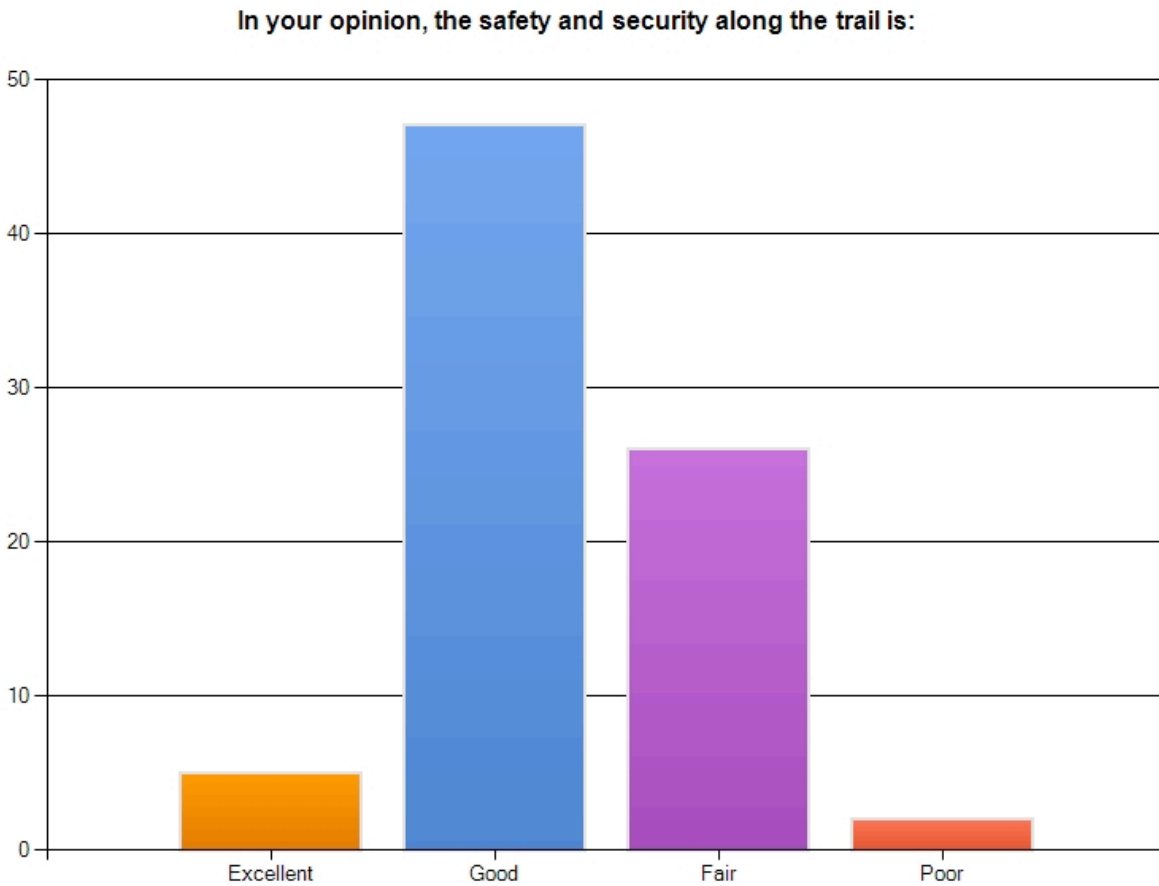


**Do you think the trails are well maintained?** A majority of surveyed trail users report that trail maintenance is good.

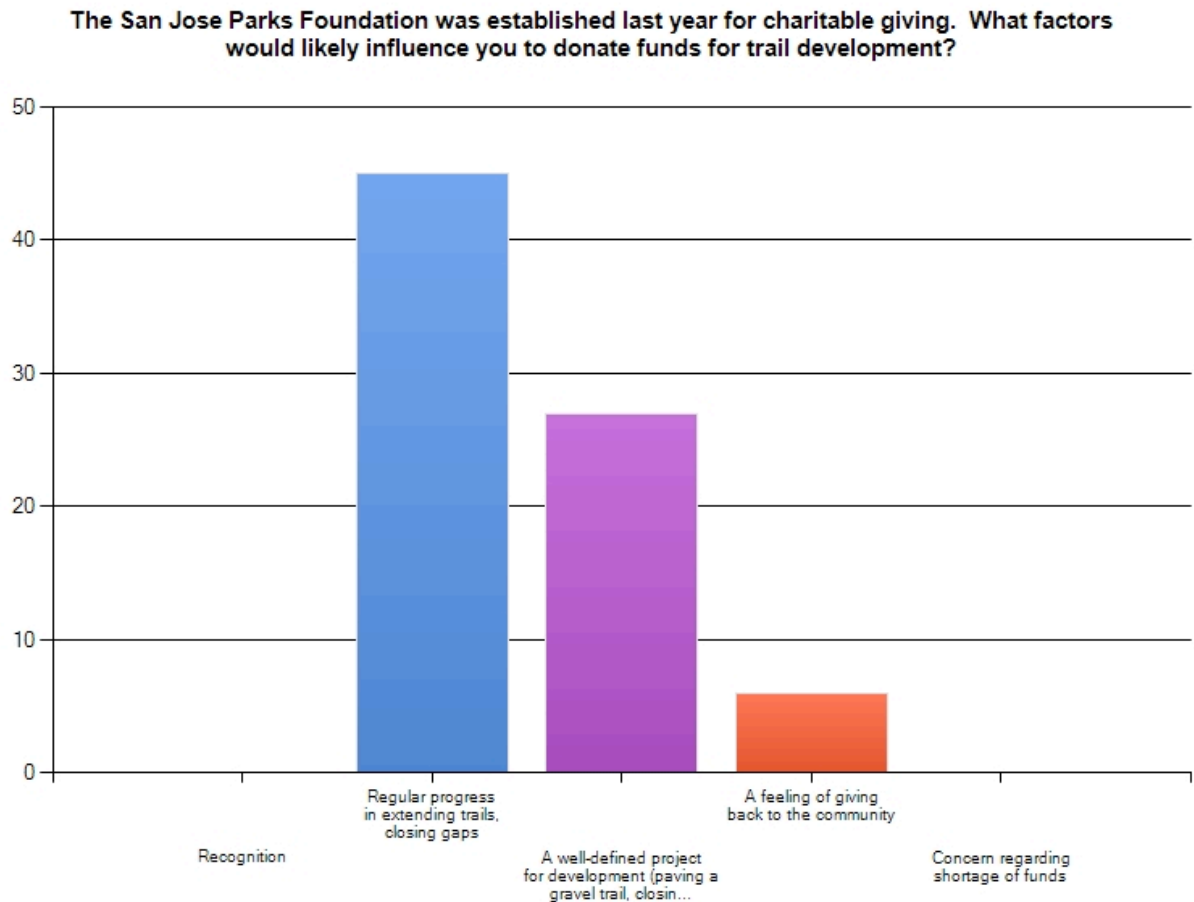
**In your opinion, the maintenance (pavement surface, benches, landscaping) of the trail is:**



**What do you think about trail safety and security?** Most trail users reported that trails are safe and secure, but a large number reported “fair”. We didn’t ask for input on the factors that influenced the response - whether there was a specific issue or experience, or just a perception.



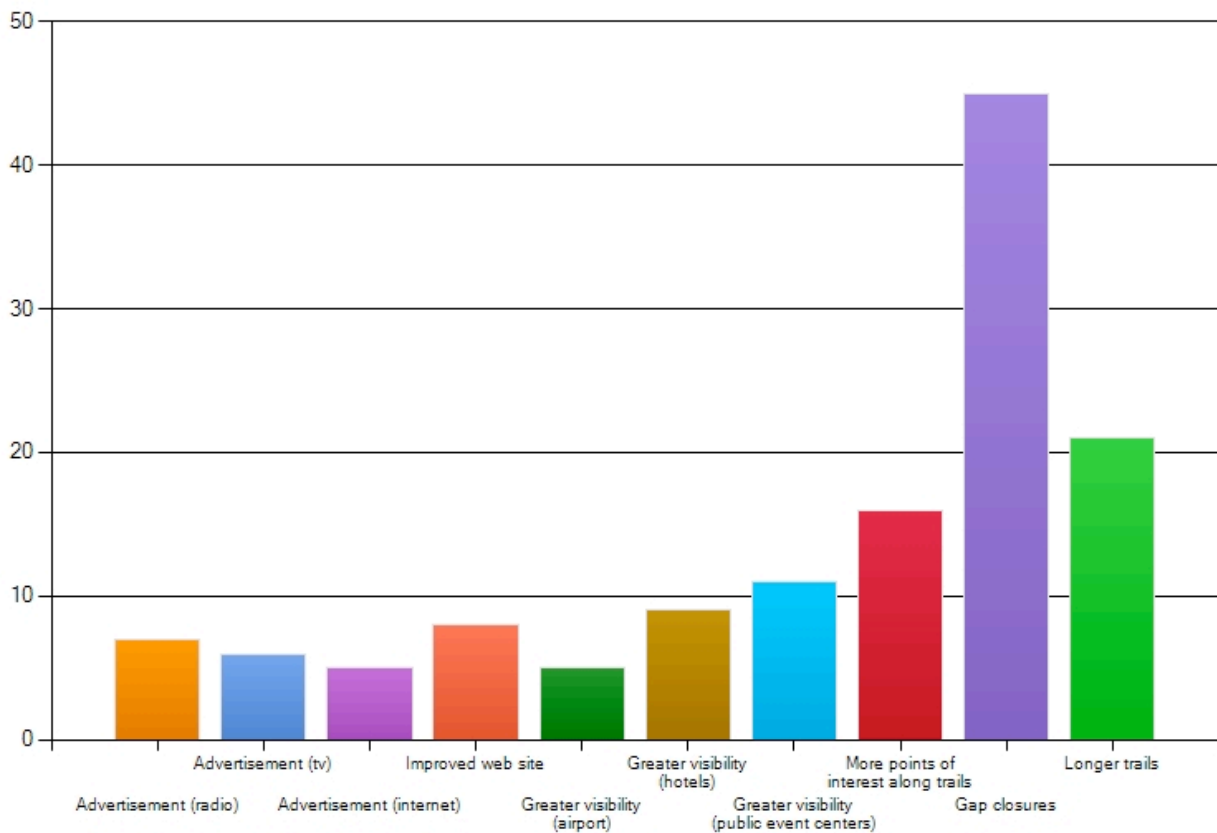
**What would influence your charitable giving?** The San Jose Parks Foundation was formed last year, and this question was asked to help determine what steps could be taken to encourage charitable contributions to support future trail development. Most survey responders would consider charitable giving if they saw regular progress made in developing trails and understood that their contribution support a specific objective. Few seek recognition.





**What could make trails more a tourist attraction?** The Trail Program web site includes a “tourism” page that proposes an itinerary for walking/bicycling along the Guadalupe River to explore the City. This question seeks to better understand how the trail program might be marketed or shaped to contribute to San Jose’s desirability as a travel destination, with the associated economic and social benefits.

**If San Jose could do one thing to make trails more of a local or tourist attraction, what would it be?**



## Numerical Findings (by Individual Trail Count Station)

**Over 2,200 trail users were counted this year.** The table includes past count data for comparative purposes.

COUNT LOCATION	2011	2010	change
GUA at Coleman	593	561	<b>+5.7%</b>
GUA at Park	496	699	-29.0%*
LGC at Hamilton	1033	1080	-4.4%
LGC at Auzerais	157	102	+53.9%
<b>total</b>	<b>2,279</b>	<b>2,442</b>	<b>-6.7%</b>
<b>New (2011) count stations</b>			
Los Alamitos near Camden	843	---	
Five Wounds future trail	98	---	

\* A significant drop was found at the Guadalupe River / Park Avenue Count Station. We believe this is due to the counting methodology used in past years. The transition from west bank to east bank, left a question as to whether or not to count a trail users twice (doing so would capture volume of traffic). The 2011 count tracked the individual trail users and only counted them once as they moved through the area. For 2012, the Park Avenue station will be relocated (likely to near San Carlos Street) so that there is a single path to count trail users.

**A 5.7% increase on the Guadalupe River Trail (Coleman Ave).** Traffic at this count station continues to increase on a year-by-year basis even though an on-street detour has been in place for 2 years as the Army Corps of Engineers have constructed a replacement railway bridge structure just south of the count station.

This was the first year that data was collected for the Los Alamitos Creek Trail and Five Wounds corridor so no comparative data is available.

## On-Line Survey Findings

The on-line survey collected data from September 28 to October 3. There were 188 responses received (237 in 2009, and 291 in 2008). The survey included multiple-choice questions, some with spaces for respondents to provide input and comments.

## Conclusion

Trail Count 2011 results show a continued increase in trail usage along the Guadalupe River Trail: A 6% increase at Coleman Avenue. A different approach to counting has impacted historical data collected at Park Avenue but can be resolved with relocation of the count station in future years. Overall, the count data is generally consistent with prior years so the methodology appears to be reliable for capturing the number of weekday trail users and obtaining their input on the trail network.

## **Acknowledgement**

Trails Program staff would like to thank the organizations and volunteers that helped to make Trail Count 2011 a successful event; including Guadalupe River Park Conservancy, Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition and the Five Wounds Community / Communiversity.